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ABSTRACT

In an effort to effect institutional change through an analysis of institutional effectiveness, California's Fresno City College (FCC) undertook a 3-year project to examine student success. In order to determine appropriate measures of and methodologies for improving student success, a Student Success Task was established, developing 13 core indicators and ranking them in terms of importance. To gain support for the process from the campus community, the Task Force then implemented several non-controversial changes, including a reserve section of textbooks in the library, a fall orientation program for new students, and a newsletter on student success. In the project, attainment of educational goals was determined to be the most crucial indicator, as well as one of the most difficult to measure and track. The college required more than an entire academic year to develop a system for capturing student goal information and to modify district computer software to maintain that information. As a result, however, college applications and semester registration forms now provide 13 goal categories from which students can choose. Using this new approach, FCC implemented a longitudinal study of all new students entering in fall 1992. Preliminary results indicate that retention at the end of 2 years was 53.97% for students intending to earn an associate degree and 55% for those intending to transfer, that 15.8% of the students earned degrees in 3 years, and that 26.1% were continuing students after 3 years. (TGI)

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Institutional Effectiveness Analysis and Student Goal Attainment in the Community College

Presented by
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Consortium for Community College Development
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Institutional Effectiveness Analysis and Student Goal Attainment in the Community College

Accountability and institutional effectiveness are not new concepts in public education. Currently, forty-three states require K-12 institutions to submit accountability reports. However, only nine states require similar reports from their 2-year public college systems. (Mills, Amsler and Kirsch, 1994) Those states that do require accountability reports tend to focus on fiscal considerations and resource availability. For example, frequently required measurements include library resources, per student expenditure, and institutional reserves. Only recently, have a growing number of professionals suggested that another perspective on accountability, one that considers student goals and

outcomes, might be of more assistance in evaluating and improving the performance of our community colleges.

What is institutional effectiveness? According to the American Association of Community Colleges, "An active, committed and caring college community, with an appropriate mission statement and effective institutional processes, provides the foundation upon which a strong institutional effectiveness program can be initiated and sustained. It is also critical that valid and accurate information should be accessible to and easily understood by all members of the college community. Such information should relate to the college's mission, provide an accounting of institutional decisions and serve as a basis for improvement and future planning." (American Association of Community Colleges, 1992)

In order to take a new approach to measuring institutional effectiveness, the first challenge is to identify those items considered to be essential goals to be measured and improved. This paper will examine the process by which a public institution, Fresno City College located in Fresno, California, has begun a process of institutional change through institutional effectiveness analysis.

Fresno City College is an "open access" institution. Any individual with a high school diploma, or who is eighteen years of age or older and able to benefit from instruction, may register. Of the enrolled students, 88% have earned a high school diploma, or the equivalent.

In 1992 the Fresno City College Future's Committee rewrote the institution's mission statement. The statement reads "The main goal of the College is to ensure student success. Human and financial resources should be directed toward that end, and accountability systems implemented to ensure the results. Everything that takes place within the College must ultimately focus on the end product: successful students." (Fresno City College Catelog, 1994) The Student Success Task Force was established in August 1993 to begin redirecting the organization towards this goal. This task force is composed of administrators, faculty, staff, and associated student body officers. Two faculty members were selected to coordinate and lead the effort, each was reassigned to the project for 40% of their respective workloads. The Student Success Project was completed in May 1996, after three years, at which time a Student Success Office was permanently established at the college. The

author of this paper has served as a Student Success Coordinator since the inception of the project.

The first challenge was to determine appropriate measurements of student success and methodologies for improving student success. The Task Force selected and prioritized thirteen core indicators of student success in September of 1993. Coincidentally the Community College Roundtable published a booklet in 1994 listing thirteen core indicators of student success, some of which are the same as those used at Fresno City College. The core indicators selected at FCC are, in prioritized order:

1. **Student Goal Attainment:** Each student declares an educational goal each semester on the registration permit.
2. **Student Satisfaction:** Surveys are administered to determine student satisfaction with access, instruction, instructional services, student services, facilities, and campus culture.
3. **Employer Assessment of Students:** Surveys are given to employers of graduates to determine satisfaction with training that they have received at FCC.

4. **Placement Rate in the Workforce:** A survey of all graduates and certificate completers is used to gather information about placement relevant to coursework.

5. **Degree/Certificate Completion:** Number and percent of students completing their stated educational goal of degree or certificate.

6. **Transfer Rate and Number:** The number and percent of students completing their stated educational goal of transfer.

7. **Fall-to-Fall Persistence:** The number and percent of students that continue their education one complete academic year, in accordance with their stated educational goal.

8. **Success after Transfer:** Fresno City College transfer student GPA and persistence at four-year institutions.

9. **Academic Value Added:** Comparison of entrance and exit assessments to measure acquired knowledge and skills.

10. **Student Personal Growth and Development:** Student self-perceived growth, community involvement, and moral development.

11. **Success in Subsequent Coursework:** Student success beyond developmental and basic skills coursework and in linearly sequential coursework.

12. **Course Retention:** Completion of a single course by a student.

13. **Student Involvement:** Student participation in college activities outside of regular classroom instruction.

In order to gain immediate support from the campus community the Task Force began to immediately implement some non-controversial changes. A reserve section of textbooks was established in the library. After three years, eight-two percent of the faculty were requesting that the books they use in their classes be placed on reserve. An on-campus Fall orientation program for new students was started with all segments of the campus community participating on a volunteer basis. A newsletter known as the Student Success Update was written by the coordinators, featuring articles to assist students, suggest new approaches to instructors, provide information on the project, emphasize the value of a college degree, and highlight students who had overcome adversity. These projects created a presence and awareness of the project. By the beginning of the second semester faculty, staff and students were calling the Student Success Office to make suggestions and offer their time.

Since the inception of the project the coordinators have continued to implement highly visible projects to encourage student success. Student Success Workshops that teach time management and study skills are offered to all students receiving a deficiency notice at mid-term. In Spring 1995, the first graduation ceremony for certificate of achievement(CA) and certificate of completion(CC) recipients was held on the campus.

That is not to say that all has gone smoothly; the scope and difficulty in both measuring and positively impacting each of the indicators has proven, at times, almost overwhelming. The most crucial indicator, attainment of educational goal, has proven to be one of the most difficult to measure and track. However, as stated by Kreider, Wallari, and Gratton, "Given the diversity of students attending a community college, assessing student success is predicated on knowing student reasons for attending." (1993) The reader has probably noticed that many of the indicators are measured according to the number of students with a stated educational goal.

Capturing the educational goal information, and modifying the district computer software to maintain that

information, required the greater part of an academic year. Past practice has been to evaluate community colleges purely upon the number of transfer students and the number of graduates. This traditional approach yields percentages that do not accurately reflect the success of our students in meeting their goals. Fresno City College has identified thirteen goal categories from which students can select on their college application, and each semester when registering. Table 1 shows stated educational goals of all students registering at Fresno City College for the academic years 1992-1993, and 1993-1994. Pragmatically, if a student achieves his/her stated goal, even if that goal was simply to improve basic skills, then the college has fulfilled its mission. This new approach to accountability assessment yields more realistic and more encouraging statistics than the traditional approach. As stated by Alfred, Peterson and White, "And as many college presidents can attest, assessing college performance without information about student goals is generally misleading. Relating goals to a variety of outcomes is conceptually sound and it is necessary for anyone wanting to paint a true picture of student success." (1992)

Analysis of other core indicators, such as transfer rate, degree completion rate, and certificate completion rate are impacted by this emphasis on the importance of the student's intentions when registering. As an example, in 1993-1994 at the census date (end of the fourth week of the semester) 17,402 students were enrolled at the college, of those 9,667 had declared a goal of completing an AA or AS degree. In May 1994, 1,252 students graduated. Using a traditional approach, estimating that one-half of the students are Sophomores, would yield a graduation rate of 1,252/8,701 or 14.29%. Using only those students who intended to earn an AA or AS degree as the base yields a rate of 1,252/4,834 or 25.90%. The Joint Commission on Accountability Reporting is currently studying this approach to assessment, and is in the process of developing a formula to sensibly evaluate institutional effectiveness.[1]

A longitudinal study of all new students entering Fresno City College in Fall 1992 is in progress. Table 2 shows student retention for that cohort of students, by

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[1] The Joint Commission on Accountability Reporting is an interassociation project of the American Association of Community Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of State Universities and Land-grant Colleges. As of this time, the commission has not made public any recommendations.

stated educational goal for three years after entering the college. Careful analysis shows that retention at the end of two years was stable for students intending to earn an AA/AS (53.97%) and those intending to transfer (54.96%). Undecided students had slightly lower retention (44.70%), while those attending for "other" reasons had a relatively low retention rate of 28.3%. This low rate is not surprising, considering that many of those students only intended to take a few classes for personal improvement or to upgrade their work skills. At the end of two years, 46.51% of the entire cohort were still enrolled. Eliminating those students in the "other" category, the retention rate was 57.83%. Also analyzed in Table 2, are the number of degrees earned. Of the total cohort, 15.79% earned degrees in three years, 15.5% of the students intending to earn degrees did so. Of interest is the fact that 23.51% of those students who originally had a goal of "other" earned degrees.

The number of students transferring in three years is considered in Table 3. Due to limitations in tracking students after they leave the college, it was necessary to estimate the number of students transferring by the number of students requesting that transcripts be sent to other

colleges. Of the 1152 students from the original cohort who requested transcripts, 293 had earned an AA or AS degree. Unduplicated headcount shows that 1617, or 33.68%, of the original cohort requested that transcripts be sent to other colleges within three years of entering Fresno City College. Of the original cohort, 1253 were continuing their studies. Table 4 illustrates the graduation, transfer and persistance patterns of the cohort. (In order to avoid double-counting, those students who both received degrees and requested transcripts are only reflected in this table as having received degree.) This study will continue to follow the same cohort of students and will continue to analyze student goal attainment in the fourth year.

One of the major challenges encountered since the student success effort started at Fresno City College, has been to incorporate the concept of student success into the campus culture; to inculcate an appreciation of the importance of student success into all that is done. It is extremely important when a campus makes a commitment to institutional effectiveness that studies and surveys be used as a source of action. Student Success Task Force activities are expected to be addressed within the appropriate

manager's budget. Additionally, budget forms have been revised to include consideration of the impact of each line item on student success. Results of surveys and studies are publicized in the Student Success Update, which is distributed free of charge throughout the campus community.

Student success is an eternal quest. Institutions never achieve complete effectiveness; there is always room for improvement and for creative ideas. Community colleges are just beginning to answer the call for accountability, and are discovering that by exceeding the demands of that call, they are able to imbue a commitment and campus pride that pervades every segment of the college.

Table 1

Student Educational Goals

STUDENT GOAL	Fall '93	Spring '94	Fall '94	Spring '95	Fall '95
BA/BS degree after AA/AS degree	7,341	6,789	7,252	6,303	6,482
BA/BS degree without AA/AS degree	2,031	1,984	2,012	1,802	1,900
AA/AS without transfer	1,537	1,463	1,484	1,479	1,539
Vocational degree without transfer	261	242	254	286	354
Vocational certificate without transfer	446	459	471	443	405
Discover/formulate career interests	516	411	461	420	429
Prepare for a new career	935	821	833	730	703
Advance in current career	742	798	699	738	711
Maintain Certificate or License	359	357	362	301	273
Educational Development	222	272	257	279	221
Improve basic skills	158	161	158	158	162
High school diploma or G.E.D.	68	57	70	87	65
Undecided on goal	3,170	3,049	3,598	3,365	3,831
Other	387	216	112	270	353
Total Students	18,173	17,079	18,023	16,661	17,428

Table 2

				Fresno City College — Fall 1992 First-Time Cohort					
Semester Attendence	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Degrees	5th	6th	Degrees	Total
	Fall 1992	Spring 1993	Fall 1993	Spring 1994	Earned	Fall 1994	Spring 1995	Earned	Degrees
					Years 1 & 2			Year 3	Earned
Goal									
AA/AS									
w/transfer	1756	1319	1124	950	15	795	650	249	264
wo/transfer	373	290	225	199	11	164	160	56	67
TOTAL	2129	1609	1349	1149	26	959	810	305	331
BA/BS									
w/AA-AS*	1756	1319	1124	950	15	795	650	249	264
wo/AA-AS	504	399	347	292	7	238	181	59	66
TOTAL	2260	1718	1471	1242	22	1033	831	308	330
CC/CA	143	101	48	41	3	36	31	30	33
UNDECIDED	1085	736	581	485	12	445	312	95	107
OTHER	940	569	405	266	46	198	178	175	221
STUDENTS CONTINUING									
	4801	3414	2730	2233	94	1876	1512	664	758
		71.11%	56.86%	46.51%	1.96%	39.08%	31.49%	13.83%	15.79%

Table 3

	FRESNO CITY COLLEGE – FALL 1992 FIRST-TIME COHORT (AFTER THREE YEARS)			
	TOTAL REQUESTING TRANSCRIPTS	NO DEGREE REQUESTING TRANSCRIPTS	TOTAL DEGREE OR TRANSCRIPT	
Goal				
AA/AS				
w/transfer	537	387	651	
wo/transfer	48	42	109	
TOTAL	585	429	760	
BA/BS				
w/AA-AS*	537	387	651	
wo/AA-AS	211	165	231	
TOTAL	748	552	882	
CC/CA	6	3	36	
UNDECIDED	230	175	282	
OTHER	120	87	308	
STUDENTS CO				
	1152	859	1617	
			33.68%	

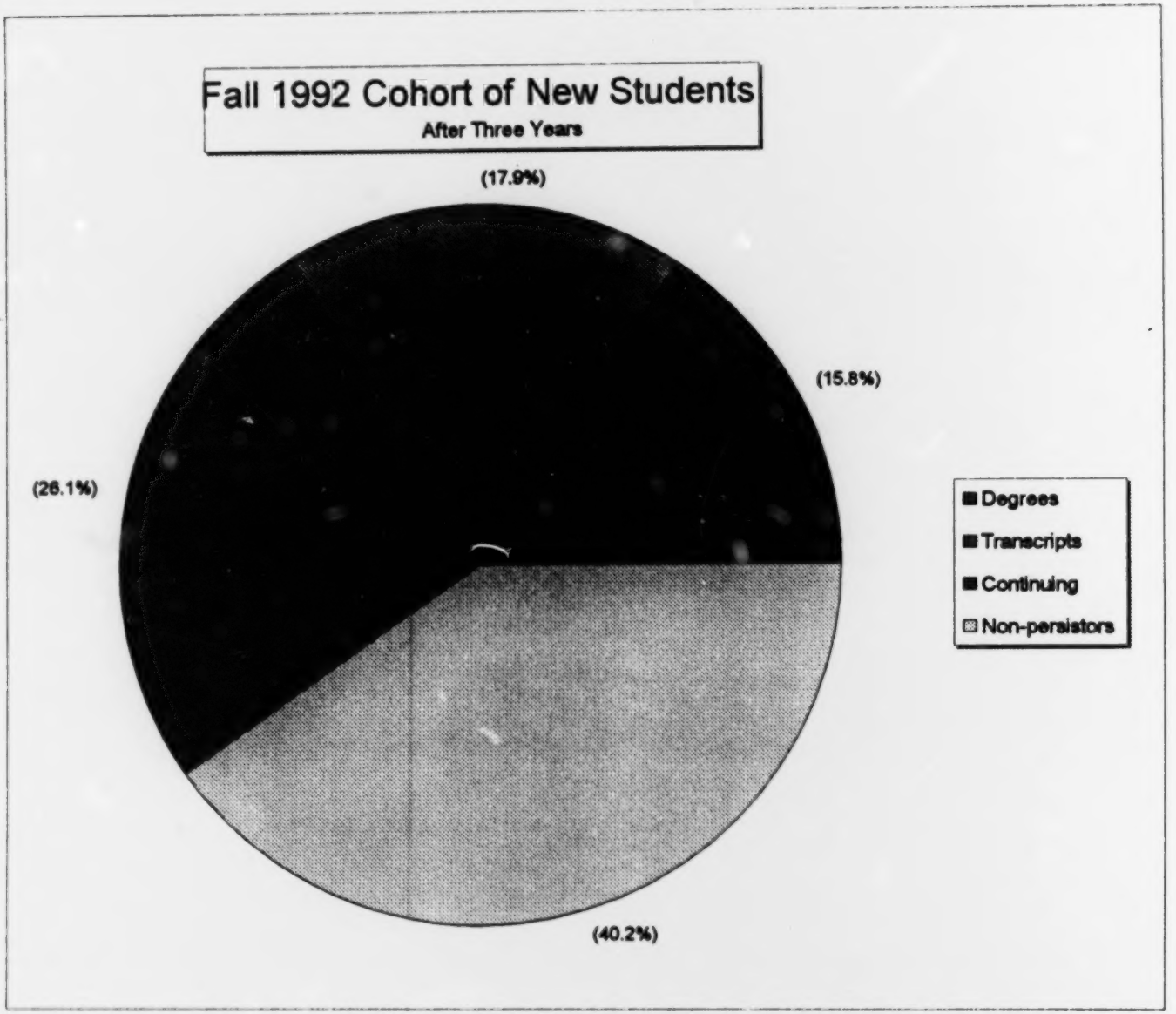
Fall 1992 Cohort of New Students
After Three Years
(17.9%)
(15.8%)
(26.1%)
(40.2%)
Degrees
Transcripts
Continuing
Non-persistors

Table 4

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